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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/ELA

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SUBJECT: SYRIAN TALKING HEADS EXPRESS ANGER OVER PRESIDENT BUSH'S UNGA SPEECH

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.5 b and d.

¶1. (C) President Bush's two-sentence critique of Syria during his farewell speech to the UN General Assembly was rebuffed by a barrage of negative remarks from the government-owned daily Al-Thawra. Print media aside from Al-Thawra was generally muted on the subject but several independent journalists and stringers took the opportunity to express displeasure with the President's comments during an introductory meeting with the Charge.

¶2. (C) Government-owned Al-Thawra newspaper published several op-ed pieces critical of President Bush's September 23 speech to the UN General Assembly. In a front-page article entitled "Bankruptcy," the author noted that President Bush's speech once again classified people as good or evil, saying, "as if he did not hear or see that the world is no longer amused by his dull jokes and the nonsense of cloning creativity and construction for the cells of chaos and destruction." The writer added that many in the world, especially in Europe, see more clearly now that "the interests of their countries and people, and perhaps their continents, are not in the hands of the United States or on its bleeding tables." In a separate piece entitled "Bankruptcy Speech," author Ali Nasrallah said President Bush repeated the same "false slogans and untrue allegations." Concluding that President Bush should have used this opportunity to "improve his country's image by acknowledging mistakes and expressing a desire to cooperate with countries and governments to address the repercussions of his wrong and haughty policy." Finally, a peace entitled "The Last Fragments," stated the President's speech "smacked of gunpowder, fire, destruction and death," and said the U.S. needs to "regain its role of maintaining world peace and security." It called upon Americans and the next administration to "draw the right conclusions and correct the mistakes" of the current U.S. administration.

¶3. (C) During a private introductory meeting with the Charge, several independent journalists -- representing ABC, Reuters, AP, and al-Safir Lebanese daily/al-Watan Syrian daily -- expressed their disappointment with the "disparaging" remarks President Bush made about Syria during his UNGA address. The journalists argued that the continued "bashing" of Syria had done little to change SARG behavior and only engendered more animosity.

¶4. (C) Comment: While we are not surprised that SARG-owned Al-Thawra expressed umbrage at the President's comments, it was somewhat unexpected to hear similar charges, though more thoughtful, being expressed by journalists who have traditionally been critical of the SARG. While we have heard

no public retort by President Asad or any other members of the regime, the thoughts expressed in Al-Thawra represent hard-line regime views. End Comment.

CONNELLY